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A NOTE ON THE

USE OF THE BIDET IN SURGERY.

BY

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*presented by the author.*

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## *A NOTE ON THE USE OF THE BIDET IN SURGERY*

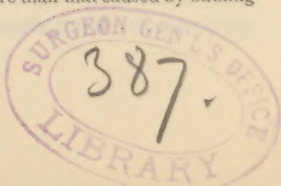
By J. WILLIAM WHITE, M.D.,

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I DESIRE to call the attention of the profession to a method of treatment which, although not altogether new, is yet not appreciated as, in my judgment, it should be. I refer to a moderately forcible stream of water of varying temperature in the treatment of a number of affections of the rectum, anus, and genito-urinary apparatus. The atonic and astringent effect of such a stream of water upon any living tissue is, of course, a well-understood<sup>1</sup> fact, and has been employed in the arrest of hemorrhage, in the treatment of inflammation, and in various other conditions. But it has only been in exceptional cases, and usually by the aid of more or less troublesome apparatus that it has been used in the class of cases to which I now refer.

The bidet, as I have now for a few years prescribed

<sup>1</sup> Agnew (Surgery, vol. i. p. 445): "There is something peculiar in the action of a fine stream of water; it produces a much more energetic contraction of muscular fibre than that caused by bathing or sponging."



it, should be of the variety which can be attached to the water-closet seat habitually used by the patient. It should have a nozzle capable of throwing a stream of about the calibre of an ordinary lead pencil or a little less. The head of water should be sufficient to make it impinge upon the parts exposed to it with enough force to excite there a little sensation of smarting and tingling. That degree of force will, for example, be sufficient to enable the patient to take an enema, or, if a female, to take a vaginal injection. The bidet pipe should be movable by means of a handle, so that the stream can be directed against any portion of the external genitals, the perineum, the anus, or the surrounding parts. It should also have connection with the hot and cold water supply of the house, so that the water may be used of any temperature which the physician may prescribe, or which the sensations of the patient may make desirable. Stopcocks should regulate the size and force of the stream, and should be so placed as to be easily reached by the hand of the individual sitting upon the water-closet seat. Such an apparatus can be put in place by an experienced plumber, in any ordinary water-closet, at an expense of from fifteen to twenty dollars; and, in this city at least, the usual head of water obtainable even in third-story rooms is quite sufficient for all therapeutic purposes.

The cases in which it may be desirable to use this method of treatment may be divided into two classes: first, those affecting the lower end of the bowel and its outlet; second, those involving the genito-urinary



system. Among the first the most important are hemorrhoids, internal and external, prolapsus ani, and slight cases of prolapsus recti; pruritus ani and eczema of the margin of the anus should also be included in this group of cases in which it has now for some time been my habit to prescribe the systematic employment, twice daily, of the bidet, once immediately after the daily stool, and for the second time, by preference, just before going to bed. As a rule, in all but the mid-winter months, the ordinary temperature of Schuylkill water is that to be preferred, although I am largely governed by the feelings of the patient in this respect. An enema should be taken at each of these times, the lower portion of the rectum being thus thoroughly washed out at least twice daily, after which the stream of water is allowed to play upon the affected region for a period of from five to fifteen minutes. The ordinary and useful effect of cool sponging or washing immediately after stool in cases of hemorrhoids is by this means enormously increased; internal hemorrhoids will, under this treatment, in many cases almost entirely disappear, unless they are exceedingly large and have been frequently inflamed or strangulated and badly neglected; external hemorrhoids, even when fleshy, will shrivel and become scarcely noticeable.

I could detail a number of cases of this character taken from my practice of the last two years. In some instances in which I had been habitually called in, at intervals of a few months, in the cases of old people the result has been practically their disap

pearance from my list of patients; and they speak in the warmest manner of the great comfort which they have derived from this simple method of treatment.

Perhaps nothing is more distressing among minor afflictions than the trouble described as *pruritus ani*, and variously attributed to liver disease, constipation, gastric troubles, latent gout, uterine disease, parasites, neuroses, and a number of other causes, varying from the eating of shell-fish, or excessive smoking, to alleged hereditary predisposition. There are very few practitioners of any experience who have not discovered how difficult it is, in any particular case of *pruritus*, to assign distinctly the annoying symptoms to any one of these causes. Often the whole list may be carefully gone through and eliminated, or the proper remedies may be applied successively, as different theories are adopted, without the slightest benefit resulting. Ointments, lotions, *ordinary* cool bathing will be tried in great variety, but without avail; and such patients will often go from one physician to another, or will fall into the hands of quacks while seeking relief. My list of cases of this character which I have now treated by means of the "bidet" comprises eight, one of which it may be worth while to mention in a little more detail.

Mr. —, aged thirty-five, a lawyer by profession, of somewhat sedentary habits, but in good general health, applied to me, in January, 1887, on account of a long-continued *pruritus*, which, he said, was simply making life miserable to him; he was a man of great intelligence, who had secured the best

medical advice in this and other cities, and who gave a graphic description of his sufferings. Whenever, after sitting for a time at his desk, the buttocks and perineum became warm, itching would begin, and would presently become intolerable, so that he would be absolutely obliged to rise, and, if he was not alone, to make some excuse to leave the room, in order to obtain ease, temporarily, by scratching. At night, after he became warm in bed, his trouble—as is usually the case with such patients—became much worse, so that often a large part of the night was rendered sleepless, and the sleep which he did procure was broken and disturbed. He frequently awakened with a start, finding himself digging at the parts with his nails. He was losing flesh rapidly, was becoming unable to attend to the ordinary duties of his profession, was annoyed and mortified, even when in court trying cases, by the almost irresistible impulse which he felt to apply friction to the irritated region, and naturally was intensely depressed and despondent.

He brought me copies of the prescriptions which had from time to time been given him, and which covered almost the entire ground of the above mentioned list of possible causes. I had—fortunately for him and for myself—just been successful in a case of much less severity, in procuring relief and apparent cure by means of the bidet; I promptly prescribed it for him, instructing him, as it was January, to use the water at a temperature a little short of tepid, and prescribed, in addition, only an ordinary oxide of zinc ointment, for the relief of a little eczematous irritation produced by his scratching. His improvement was immediate and marked, and at the end of two weeks he said that he had merely a trace of his former trouble, which soon after entirely disappeared, and he has ever since remained free, although he has

been compelled to take long trips away from home, and thus obliged to intermit his treatment.

Some of my other cases are of equally striking character. They have nearly all resulted in cure; requiring to attain that end simply different lengths of time of the application of the douche, with variations in the temperature of the water, and occasionally the use of some emollient salve. I have been particularly struck by the fact that these cases include among their supposed causes widely distinct conditions, and the uniformity with which they have yielded to this simple treatment has led me to regard with suspicion the orthodox etiology of the disease. In procidentia ani, and in slight cases of prolapsus recti, I have had very satisfactory though, of course, less striking results. In a few instances the trouble almost entirely disappeared, and in all of them it was distinctly relieved. These cases require for their successful treatment a much longer application of the douche, and the water should, in my judgment, be at one or the other extremes of temperature, either quite cool, or as hot as can comfortably be borne.

I am quite aware that the use of cold water in these affections is not in the least a novel plan of treatment; but the method under consideration combines the effects of temperature with a sufficient force of the stream, and admits of the prolonged application of the remedy without effort on the part of the patient, who is in the most suitable position for this treatment, practical points which induced me to make this mention of my results in rectal and anal cases.



Agnew says of pruritus, that among the local remedies frequent ablutions with cold water should be mentioned ; and of prolapsus ani et recti, that “in all cases where remedies have proved unavailing, or where patients have declined an operation, much good may be done by douching the parts with cold water and applying an oiled compress ;” and Allingham says of the same class of cases, that “the frequent and bountiful application of cold water is to be most strongly recommended ;” but few authors, so far as I know, have especially alluded to the method of application by means of a bidet.

My second class of cases includes, chiefly, certain prostatic troubles, varicocele, atonic impotence in the male, and pruritus of the vulva or vaginitis in the female. In cases of varicocele, although I have not succeeded in effecting a cure in any instance by this method, I have certainly seen advancing enlargements of the spermatic veins become stationary ; long, relaxed, and pendulous scrotums become firm and much smaller ; and the mental condition of the patient—which is so important an element in many of these cases—share in the improvement. In chronic prostatitis, a most intractable and distressing ailment in many instances, it has come to be a part of my routine treatment to order the use of cold perineal douches by means of the bidet, associated with frequent cool enemata given in the same manner ; and I believe to-day that if I had to discard all therapeutic measures but one in these cases, I would retain this one. In a certain number of cases of impotence associated with general muscular

weakness, loss of tone, lack of general strength and vitality, accompanied by imperfect or rapidly subsiding erections, I have found that the cold douche applied with some force and for considerable lengths of time to the perineum and testicles has been productive of marked benefit.

In two cases of *pruritus vulvæ* my results have been good, though less striking than in the similar disease affecting the region of the anus. In vaginitis, where the woman has sufficient intelligence to learn how to take an injection by means of the bidet, it offers an admirable method of cleansing the vagina, of carrying away thoroughly all accumulated secretions, of reducing heat and swelling, and at the same time of avoiding the frequent introduction into the inflamed canal of a foreign body in the shape of the nozzle of a syringe. My opportunities for observation in this class of cases have been limited, owing to the disinclination of these patients to procure the bidet, and owing to their irregular habits of life and their frequent changes of residence ; but I have seen enough of its good results to make me feel confident that it is a valuable addition to our therapeutic agencies.

After all, in every one of the cases which I have mentioned, its use is simply the application of the most elementary and common-sense principles to everyday practice, but I am satisfied that this particular method of applying these principles has not received the attention which it merits.



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